

Holocaust Denial as a Soft Power Instrument of the Islamic Republic of Iran

My name is Sofya Shestakova. I am an undergraduate student of Kemerovo State University. As a freshman, I was invited to the UN Eurasian Model as a delegate of the State of Israel. To defend Israeli interests, I carefully studied literature and sources, including those related to the Holocaust. I was horrified how Jews were subjected to such terror, so I decided to explore this topic in more detail. After conversation with my grandmother, it turned out that my great-grandfather, Zakhar Moiseevich, was Jewish. Fortunately, he did not fall a victim of the Holocaust, but he was subjected to repression. So it is very important for me to be here.

In the modern world, an urgent problem is the preservation and formation of the historical memory for the benefit of future generations. It is a memory part of our historical heritage. Unfortunately, the falsification of historical events, in particular Holocaust denial, and the distortion of history are political instruments. Holocaust denial is a soft power instrument of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The objectives of the work were to investigate what a manifestation of “soft power” is, to consider methods of Holocaust denial, and to highlight the danger of falsification.

During the reign of Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi, Iran and Israel cooperated closely in the military, political, economic, and energy spheres. However, the Islamic Revolution in Iran changed relations between the two states. According to the principle of the Islamic Awakening, Iranian spiritual leader Ayatollah Khomeini stated that Israel is "the enemy of the Palestinian Arabs, therefore, of the Islamic world". Thus, anti-Israeli politics became one of the main directions of Iranian foreign policy and included, among other things, Holocaust denial, which was manifested through soft power.

The idea of using Holocaust denial as an instrument was initiated by President Ahmadinejad. He claimed that «Europeans fabricated a legend named “Massacre of the Jews”, and they hold it higher than God himself, religion itself and the prophets themselves». This can be regarded as a protest of anti-Zionist factions, because only a month earlier, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution, declaring 27 January as the “International Holocaust Remembrance Day”.

Another feature of Iranian Holocaust denial is that they seek to corroborate their political statements with scientific research concocted by the Iranian Center for Scientific and Political Research. Among the books published, we can find, for instance, “What is Hiding Behind the Concept of the Holocaust” by Mohammad-Tagi Tagipur and “The Place of the Holocaust in the Zionist Project: Truth and Myth” by Seyyed Mohammad Tarrahi. This shows a popularization of Holocaust denial in research and educational spheres of society.

In this age of globalization, we cannot imagine our lives without mass-media. It is one of the instruments of major impact on people. In 2006, the Hamshahri newspaper announced a Holocaust caricature contest, attracting participants with cash prizes. Due to the fact that the caricatures are publicly available, many people who are not aware of the Holocaust might have considered them as true.

Iran even tried to popularize Holocaust denial at the international level. In this regard, a Tehran international conference was organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2006 on “Holocaust Revisionism : a Global Vision”. This prompted protests from the world community. In January 2007, the UN General Assembly adopted a special resolution without voting, condemning “any denial of the Holocaust,” and in October, UNESCO General Assembly adopted a similar resolution. These documents are of key importance. It should be mentioned that one of the aims of Holocaust denial policy is to distract the world community from Iran’s nuclear program.

It seemed that following Rouhani’s accession to power, the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding the Holocaust would change. However, his statements do not contain a single word about the recognition of the Holocaust, or about softening positions in relation to Israel. Moreover, on the eve of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, another Cartoon Competition was announced. Entries from “The May Holocaust Cartoon Exhibition” were publicly displayed in the provinces of Iran.

In 2014, on Iranian state television, a Tehran university lecturer stated that “most sorcerers are Jews” who use their powers against Iran. Here soft power takes shape of a public TV interview on a government channel. It is another demonstration of the ways used to form anti-Israeli and antisemitic sentiments in society by means of ideology.

The example of the Islamic Republic of Iran demonstrates how catchy populist statements can form public misconceptions, provoke new conflicts, and falsify historical facts.

It is necessary to understand how dangerous Holocaust denial is. Firstly, it may lead to a revival of chauvinism. Secondly, it may negate UN resolutions. Thirdly, Holocaust denial may lead to a new wave of anti-Zionism. Finally, denying the Holocaust, people create the conditions for its possible repetition and desecrate the feelings and memory of a people. I believe that we should do our best to perpetuate the memory of those who died during the Holocaust and under no circumstance can we let this tragedy be forgotten.